

only of misunderstanding, letters but
bottomless pitfalls,
words mere veils across a sympathy which
might, perhaps, have shone clearly without them, must
feel here as
if they had come suddenly upon a landscape
but too well
known. Even in that desert of the soul the tree
of silence still
bears its fruit of peace: or so it seems for a
moment. Then
the mirage fades and the ache of thirst comes
back again.
But here, indeed, we have passed from
proverbs to
poetry, from Polonius to Hamlet. It is,
indeed, only
when silence becomes beautiful that it
becomes really
interesting to us now. Yet how often that is!
But it is the
poets who have found it out: even the
rhythm of their
verses, in a way of its own, puts into
practice their discovery. The music, the sonority, the
trumpet-calls and
organ-notes of poetry we all know: we think
less often of
its gracious silences* The poet rises
—'conticuere omnes, a
hush falls round him* But Silence is more
than merely
the herald who gains him hearing: she is
also the quiet
partner of his harmonies. Such, for example,
is the grace
of those moments when in the marble
colonnade of
Virgil's polished and fluted hexameters
appears suddenly,
like a broken pillar, a line that lacks its end.
The learned
have disputed whether these short lines,
peculiar to him
among Roman poets, were left so of set
purpose; or are
in all cases, to use his own phrase of at least
some of them,

mere 'props' to uphold temporarily his great
fabric, which
still lacked the final touches when the dying
poet ordered
his executors to give it to the flames. This
view seems on
the whole the likelier: there are no parallels
for such a
deliberate use of short lines anywhere in
ancient hexa-
meters, as there are in English blank verse.¹
But few can
regret the splendid incompleteness of such a
cadence as

^•It has been urged as a proof that Virgil's half-
lines were not
meant to be completed, that Ovid said of a couplet of
Varro Atacinus: